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Ikuho Amano

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Ikuho Amano*

In praise of iron grandeur: the sensibility of *kōjō moe* and the reinvention of urban technoscape

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Abstract: Since the late 1980s, sci-fi fans and machinery aficionados in Japan have expressed their fascination with factories, projecting an imagination that sites of industrial facilities are simulacra of futuristic urban technoscape portrayed in Hollywood films. Although factory watching used to be an activity for a limited population, in the past decade organized factory night tours are becoming increasingly popular in Japan. This type of tour has expanded public interest in factories located on coastal industrial zones as a form of popular leisure-time activity. Widely known as *kōjō moe* ('factory infatuation'), fans have elevated plants to objects for aesthetic appreciation. This mutation of value corresponds to an emergence of metaphysical durability of social objects as theorized by Michael Thompson's (1979) *Rubbish Theory*. In the context of postwar Japan, those industrial factories have become, in Marilyn Ivy's (1995) term, a significant form of cultural industry that complements the absence of local identity. A second driving force of *kōjō moe* is the contemporary digital technology that has altered the viewer's experience of industrial factories. The circulation of digitally manipulated images provokes nostalgic sentiments and attracts the viewer to factory night tours. In the context of economic demise and gradual transition to postindustrial society, industrial factories represent the previous age of material grandeur. Alongside, *kōjō moe* has set forth long-lasting artistic values of them as cultural capital.

Keywords: *kōjō moe*, urban landscape, factory tourism, rubbish theory, photography

*Corresponding author: Ikuho Amano, University of Nebraska-Lincoln,
E-mail: iamano2@unl.edu

1 Introduction

This paper investigates the growing popularity of industrial factories in the past three decades, with special focus on Japan. The main question is how and why factories in coastal zones of major industrial cities have experienced a transformation into “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986). A focal point of the paper is an analysis of organized factory night tours and visual images of factories. In contrast to the 1980s, when the activity of factory viewing was known only to a limited range of sci-fi fans, today such organized tours have become a popular form of leisure recognized nationwide. The analysis starts with contextualizing the social implication of industrial factories within the high growth of the 1960s and 1970s and the way factories are currently observed by adherents of *kōjō moe* (‘factory infatuation’). By documenting actual factory tours and participants’ reflections, we will then look into the major platforms that have fueled public interest in factories. The final part of the analysis explores the role of visual technology as a major conductor for the contemporary boom in public interest for factories.

Throughout the analysis, this paper considers two dimensions of *kōjō moe* as keys to decipher the phenomenon as a whole: (i) *kōjō moe* as the byproduct of a transitory material value and aesthetic standard and (ii) *kōjō moe* as a collective social effort of reviving industrial factories in the form of “valuable cultural capital.” The paper also references Michael Thompson’s (1979) rubbish theory, which traces a process from the material mutation of objects to changes in their social consumption. In the light of Thompson, industrial factories, while still being in operation, are today viewed as value-laden objects not for their primary function as socioeconomic infrastructure but, in the context of *kōjō moe*, for their visually fascinating quality. Within the historical context of postwar Japan, the theory of the social creation of cultural capital by Marilyn Ivy (1995) and Jordan Sand (2013) provides this paper with an interesting precedent in holding that the value of objects within the social sphere can be maintained through an active effort to reify them in sharable form. The creation of visibility for the hitherto invisible and non-valuable also is a constitutive element of the contemporary social phenomenon of *kōjō moe*.

All these theoretical strands remind us that the social significance of industrial plants is bound to move away from the purely tangible material with changing times and conditions at their location. We can extend our inquiry to similar cultural practices, considering whether the valorization of aged objects is unique to the case of industrial factories. In the last decade, so-called *haikyo* (ruins, abandoned buildings, including factories) have experienced a similar increase in public attention as industrial factories. However, compared to the

kōjō moe phenomena, there is both overlap and dissimilarity in the physical objects of the attention. While both factories and ruins are aged objects which stimulate the viewer's imagination, *haikyo* are no longer in operation or use, and therefore imprinted with more diachronic drama on their "dead bodies." According to Kobayashi Tetsurō, photographer and author of *Haikyo Disukabarī* ('Discovering Ruins') (2008), *Haikyo Disukabarī 2* (2009), and *Kōjō Disukabarī* ('Discovering Factories') (2010), those who visit *haikyo* are motivated by an instinct of witnessing something potentially frightening. He writes, "the sense of terror while being inside abandoned buildings, the gap between the sense of relief after getting outside – this psychic trajectory that cannot be achieved by peaceful quotidian life" is the essence of *haikyo* tours (Kobayashi 2009: 127). Certainly this sort of fear-provoking effect is not within the parameter of factory night tours. In lieu of excessive adventure, illuminated factory night views embody the visual pleasure sought after by the general public because they are more universally appealing. Keeping this difference in mind, the goal of this paper is to explore the distinguishing factors that have supported the *kōjō moe* boom, in particular from an aesthetic viewpoint.

2 What is *kōjō moe*?

Known by the popular term "*kōjō moe*," in the past few decades industrial factories in Japan have attracted thousands of visitors who appreciate views of urban technoscape. Paying homage to industrial sites is an entirely volitional activity with no implication of any vocational purpose. Today, factory night tours have gained social recognition as a popular form of leisure-time activity. The main purpose of these tours is to appreciate the swarm of gleaming images of factories rising in darkness, a mesmerizing spectacle that comes to life only at night.

Etymologically, *kōjō moe* is a recent neologism that combines "factory" (*kōjō*) and "infatuation" or "admiration" (*moe*). Although the original source of the coinage is not clearly known, the term began to circulate around 2007 as an offshoot of a growing sensibility for *moe* as a social phenomenon.¹ Whereas *kōjō moe* became publicly known because of the plethora of factory night tours,

¹ According to Patrick W. Galbraith's *The Moé Manifesto* (2014: 5–6), *moé* (萌え) is "the noun form of the verb *moeru*, meaning to burst into bud or sprout," which has been brought into a contemporary usage that means "an affectionate response to fictional characters" in two- or three-dimensional material representations. The term, varyingly spelled as *moé* and *moe*, is now used to refer to a larger variety of objects, fictional and non-fictional.

the pilgrimage to factory sites has been a popular practice among a limited number of individuals, such as sci-fi fans and machinery fans, since the late 1980s, though at a far smaller scale than at present. Today, industrial factories allure not only niche fan bases but a wider range of the general public, including overseas visitors. There are general assumptions that *kōjō moe* is part and parcel of Japan's collective nostalgia for the bygone age of high economic growth. The explanation sounds plausible and yet remains insufficient in accounting for the recent popularity of factory views among those who are neither members of the postwar baby-boomer generation nor avid sci-fi or machinery fans. The following analysis intends to shed some more light on this question.

3 The genesis of *kōjō moe*: how industrial factories became the subject of appreciation

First, it is beneficial to note that *kōjō moe* is not an insular phenomenon unique to contemporary Japan. As early as 1929, modernist art critic Itagaki Takao (1894–1966) in his essay “Kikai to geijutsu to no kōryū” (‘Interaction between machinery and art’; Itagaki 2011) expressed the view that machinery is the vanguard of beauty. Industrial modernity in late nineteenth-century Europe had already discovered visually intriguing aspects in iron-made objects, as notably observed in the Eiffel Tower and the Machinery Hall presented at the Universal Exposition of 1889 in Paris. In the early twentieth century the Futurist movement led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti found in the form and function of machinery an aesthetic value akin to “a new religion” (Itagaki 2011: 25). The subsequent decades further fueled the visions in the field of industrial design and architecture. Such individuals or groups as Le Corbusier, Deutscher Werkbund, Anatoliy Vasilievich Lunacharsky, and Bauhaus succeeded in unifying functionality with beauty (Itagaki 2011: 27). Their attempt was a response to the clumsy design prevalent in factories of the previous decades, which lacked an organic structure of individual parts (machinery room, physical plant, cooling tower, etc.). The absence of totality in industrial facilities was later addressed by such monumental facilities as Eugène Freyssinet’s aircraft hangar and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s signal tower (Itagaki 2011: 51–52). Along with the visual evolution of machinery, human sense also became susceptible of the beauty in unified objects (Itagaki 2011: 54). Thus, if industrial modernity was tantamount to technological development for productivity, the other side of the coin was the expansion of what beauty meant for this epoch.

Similarly, the continuation of *kōjō moe* phenomena since the 1980s suggests that industrial factories have been recognized as objects worthy of visual appreciation. Nonetheless, as a collective social phenomenon, *kōjō moe* does not dwell simply on the issues of aesthetics. It has articulated a specific social perception of material reality in urban settings. The plethora of recent factory night tours suggests not just a lighthearted leisure but an implicit homage to the locus that materially represents the age of high economic growth. Therefore, the popularity of tours among the generation of baby-boomers to some extent conveys an indirect re-affirmation of the postwar system, in which the ruling Liberal Democratic Party encouraged massive investments in steel, petrochemicals, and shipbuilding during the 1960s (Flath 2014: 213). Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, strategically designated fields of key industry (*kikan sangyō*) including steel, energy, and machinery came to fruition. Yet not only these cases of success but also the subsequent economic downturn seem to have contributed to the rise of *kōjō moe*. Following the collapse of the economic bubble at the end of the 1980s, Japan entered a long period of economic stagnation. It is certainly no coincidence that *kōjō moe* became a widespread boom during these “Lost Decades,” as the appraisal of domestic assets served to re-charge local and national pride.

The germination of the *kōjō moe* trend goes back to the late 1980s. According to Ishii Tetsu, the author and photographer of two influential books, *Kōjō moe* (Ishii and Ōyama 2007) and its sequel *Kōjō moe F* (Ishii and Ōyama 2009), *kōjō moe* is part and parcel of a postmodern fascination with the urban landscape. It had developed among Japanese sci-fi fans who were influenced by the visual images of urban landscapes in the two Hollywood films *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Black Rain* (1989), both directed by Ridley Scott (Ishii and Ōyama 2007: 111).² These dystopian films changed the perception of factories in domestic cities like Tokyo and Osaka, which were often associated with negative images of environmental pollution and socially marginal zones. In these films the urban space is portrayed as dark and degenerated, accentuated by rundown factories, chimneys, or pipelines glittering in dim light. Despite such bleak images, those artificial objects in darkness created the *mise-en-scène* of urban reality par excellence. The consequence brought about by the films was that the factory, originally depicted as a site of filth and nightmarish crime, by the oxymoronic use of light unfolded a beauty like rejuvenated gems.

² According to Ishii's note, Scott was inspired by the view of the Keihin Industrial Complex (Keihin Kombinat) he saw from the airplane landing on Haneda Airport and recreated the image in *Blade Runner*. In *Black Rain* he employed the plant view of Nakayama Steel Manufacture (Nakayama Seikō) in Osaka (Ishii and Ōyama 2007: 111).

In the later development of *kōjō moe* phenomena, the role of photography has become no less important as a medium of recording static images of detailed structures as well as dramatic industrial landscapes. In this regard, *Industrial Landscapes* (2002) by Bernd and Hilla Becher has been one of the most influential publications for Japanese factory fans (Ishii and Ōyama 2007: 110). Mediated by film and photography, the public's limited view of factories as cold iron clusters has been changed dramatically – they are no longer forlorn objects menacing humanity, but something congenial to the aesthetic sensibility innate to us (Matsutomo 2008: 79).

4 *Kōjō moe* as the complex gaze upon the golden age of economic growth

Whereas Scott's films allegedly awoke Japanese sci-fi fans' fascination with industrial cityscape, a definite origin of *kōjō moe* is difficult to trace back. Alongside the visual revolution passed down from the 1980s' movies, the more recent popularity of factory night tours has been inspired by a collective memory of the age of high growth and its industrial achievements. It is possible to posit that the post-bubble decline of the manufacturing industry fueled a public impulse of revising the national legacy. Regarding this point, for example, Matsutomo Chikako (2008: 77) states that *kōjō moe* is a collective craving for "a sense of grandeur, sublimity, and beauty" embedded in the robust materiality of factories that can restage the age of high growth in the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, Ōyama Ken, co-author of the aforementioned *Kōjō moe* and *Kōjō moe F*, states that sceneries of industrial factories possess a power of provoking certain nostalgic feelings (Ishii and Ōyama 2007: 3). Though rather subjective and romantically charged, these views reveal elusive traits of *kōjō moe*, which largely consist in the viewer's phenomenological experience of industrial sceneries.

These lines of account for the popularity of *kōjō moe* are representative in terms of our retrospective consideration of Japan's industrial development. During the 1960s and 1970s the heavy industry observed a steady increase of capital investment, production, and growing domestic market in rapidly urbanized large cities (Yoshikawa 2001: 7–9). The cycle of these thriving economic activities continued through the 1980s, until the end of the economic bubble curtailed the scenario of the ever-growing GDP. In the subsequent two decades Japan was to face a period of long recession, which has in some sense lasted even after Prime Minister Abe Shinzō announced his economic policy based on

“fiscal expansion, monetary easing, and structural reform” in 2012 (Council on Foreign Relations 2016). This trajectory of economic development is a significant factor for the popularity of *kōjō moe*, as it awakens the memories of a nation that used to boast the second largest economy of the world.

Emphasizing the visual appeal of factories, as critic Omuka Toshiharu (2008: 90) surmises, has rejuvenated the collective gaze upon “the remnant of modernity” that spectacularly achieved massive industrial projects. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, at least domestically, the economic focus in Japan has shifted from heavy industry to information technology as well as to service industries. Domestic corporate investments in the manufacturing sector have fallen, not least due to relocations to other Asian countries such as China, Thailand, and Vietnam. The hollowed-out industry is a symptomatic issue for many developed nations as it diminishes the local economy that used to sustain a larger labor population. The implication of *kōjō moe* is that of dreaming of another advent of material grandeur that inspires people with awe (Omuka 2008: 89–90).

At its heart, *kōjō moe* holds a revisionist drive that dearly cherishes the past while implicitly averting public attention from the negative factors behind industrial development. In reality, the majority of manufacturing facilities in bay areas were constructed on reclaimed lands built on sea. From the 1960s onwards, these industrial districts were dismissed from public attention as a space devoid of aesthetic merits and rather antagonized as an anathema detrimental to public health, environment, and natural resources. Life-threatening byproducts discharged out of factories included photochemical smog, spillage of crude petroleum, and other industrial wastes (Masano 2013: 5–8). Major industrial areas including Keihin (Tokyo/Kanagawa), Hanshin (Osaka/Kobe), and Yokkaichi (Mie) all suffered from the handling of those outputs that caused serious air pollution.

The industrial development thus was a double-edged sword that not only brought prosperity but also jeopardized the well-being of citizens. It resulted in a sense of impossibility to embrace the high growth as a positively sharable legacy. Against this background, the boom of *kōjō moe* can be understood as a collective, yet largely unconscious response to what Marilyn Ivy (1995: 10) observes as anxiety about “a troubling lack of success at the very interior of national self-fashioning.”³ This statement may be extended to the age of post-

³ Marilyn Ivy’s *Discourses of the Vanishing* (1995) primarily centers on modernist nostalgia for folkloric traditions, local topographic knowledge, etc. Although the target subjects are different, I borrow her theoretical analysis of cultural industry based on local resources as a strategy of regional identity. Both vanishing indigenous knowledges and industrial factories are sour-

war high economic growth that achieved a considerable degree of success in industrialization, but at the cost of sacrifice and disgrace in the form of politically forced planning on locality, dissociation between labor and laborers, and environmental pollution. Simultaneously, the fear of a discontinued growth in industry and economy entails the negation of such possibility in the service of “tourism, [...], education, and mass media” (Ivy 1995: 10).

Factory night tours, at the forefront of the cultural industry of *kōjō moe*, therefore provide “the consuming and the consumable pleasure of nostalgia as an ambivalent longing to erase the temporal difference between subject and object of desire” (Ivy 1995: 10), catering as they do mainly to the so-called baby boomers and their children. Further, those facilities commemorate the passing of time, and their wear and tear as the result of aging are not mere signs of detrimental functionality. According to Jordan Sand (2013: 107), who sheds light on the semantic transformations of domestic objects in quotidian space, the practice of factory tourism inspires “human life reworking the fossilizing forms of second nature.” The effect, as observed precisely in the various phenomena of *kōjō moe*, is an infatuation with the new visionary experience, an excitement for the discovery of “the landscape with the fresh eye of a child” in that adults “reconstruct the ‘original landscape’ of their youths.”

This paradigmatic shift in the perception of industrial factories illustrates a prime example of the process of mutation that tangible objects go through in different stages of social life, as studied by Michael Thompson’s *Rubbish Theory* (1979). In reality, most industrial factories subjected to *kōjō moe* phenomena are still actively in operation and thus not yet “rubbish” as social capital. However, the model illuminates the shift of value in the viewer’s perception when we consider that the primary mission of aging industry and factories as its embodiment has reached the point of demise.

To counter the diminishing role in production and social position, before complete retirement, a new mission that justifies the existence of those factories is collectively invented by factory fans. The cultural trend plays a messianic role for industrial factories as it creates a rupture in twofold negativity: the declining use value and the bad public image. Therefore, the change has occurred not at the level of the actual materiality of the objects in question. What the *kōjō moe* phenomena brought about is fundamental changes in people’s “cognition” about the physical presence of factories in social space, to borrow Thompson’s words. In his theoretical framework, aging factories can be not simply tangible objects but “socially processed objects” since their values in

ces of local history in need of socially sharable forms of cultural industry such as museums and factory night tours.

light of the *kōjō moe* context belong to an extra-material realm (Thompson 1979: 77).

The value of certain objects does not remain static but mutates in three stages: “transient, rubbish, and durable” (Thompson 1979: 103). Built for mass production, many industrial factories are bound to see a phase of decline in productivity or the full-range of operations down the road. In this fate the significance of factories as social capital departs the stage of “the transient” toward “rubbish” (though in a hyperbolic sense here) due to depreciation and inability to meet production needs and other factors. In terms of this transition, aging implies a negative decrease of value, a consequence immanent in all tangible objects. Nonetheless, the sensibility of *kōjō moe* reifies an aesthetic of gradually aging factories in socioeconomic conditions, and thereby affords to create a new value for them. Industrial factories are sooner or later bound to be “rubbish” but possess a potential to move forward to the stage of what Thompson calls “the durable,” due precisely to their physical beauty that remains even after the primary function is no longer efficacious.

Along with the material conditions those factories are bound up with, this perspective calls our attention to the sociocultural value system that had been eclipsed in production-driven late capitalist Japan and other developed nations. Given the fact that *kōjō moe* has grown into a phenomenon prevalent across the country, it cannot be dismissed as a momentary trend. Through recognition of beauty, *kōjō moe* reinforces a sense of nostalgia while tacitly hammering out an aspiration to rejuvenate the material grandeur through sensory pleasure of vision. The grandeur of iron bodies then, at least in the older generations’ view, symbolically rejuvenates the vigor of such industrial fields as oil and iron refinement, coal and chemical production, and other manufacturing sectors (Nishioka 2007: 16–17).

These observations in the service of nostalgia and re-discovery of value are helpful to understand the growth of factory night tours, which serve as what Ivy considers a “consumable form of cultural capital.” With the working of time, industrial factories, forlorn objects of the past, achieve a status of cultural commodity that also reaffirms the national achievement, now in the visible form of the beautiful. This sort of Copernican turn in perception has been actively promoted by organizers of night factory tours – they commodify them as a significant portal to the non-quotidian space laden with artwork-like value (*bijutsusakuhin-teki kachi*), to borrow the words of night-view critic Marumaru Motoo.⁴ As such a common dictum suggests, factory night tours, as a popular

4 <http://www.superyakei.com/yakeigaku/> (accessed 4 April 2016).

cultural platform, cater to a wide range of participants, for whom the national history is not a great concern. For a comprehensive grasp of the contemporary *kōjō moe* phenomenon, therefore, it is necessary to extend our analysis from the issues of history, as well as from core sci-fi fandoms, to wider factors that attract the contemporary general public. The following discussion thus takes heed of the formation of cultural capital out of the *kōjō moe* boom. First, we will overview the general structure of factory night tours and participants' visual experiences. Then we will shift our attention to industrial factories as providers of content for visual multimedia.

5 Contemporary trends of *kōjō moe* observed in factory night tours

Today various entities offer factory night tours for a wide range of visitors. Night tours are typically organized by third parties, such as divisions within public offices like the municipal hall or the chamber of commerce in charge of local tourism and commissioned travel agencies. The primary purpose of night tours is to facilitate participants to enjoy factory views from a vantage point where their physical security is assured. With the support of a guide, such tours also offer a brief overview of local industry, geography, and the function of facilities en route.⁵ With this added value, tours usually offer ready-made programs that can be purchased online or through local travel agencies. This type of tour is typically called *rinkai kōgyō chitai kengaku tsuā* ('bay-area industrial zone observation tour') or *kōjō yakei tsuā* ('factory night view tour'). Organizers almost always advertise local factory zones by defining them as "*kankō shigen*" ('cultural capital for sightseeing'), and in so doing emphasize the physical experience of those sites.

While the tours used to take place in the evenings of late spring, summer, and early autumn, when the sea breeze and temperature are mild and pleasant, in recent years they are operated even during the winter months.⁶ Popular

⁵ The analysis of factory night tours is based on the author's experiences as a participant of two tours in summer 2014 and summer 2015. These tours covered the coastal zones of Yokohama and Kawasaki, as well as Yokkaichi. The tour operators of the former were Tabi Plus One, and the latter was Daiichi Kankō Co. These tours are advertised online, for example on websites such as www.tabione.com or www.reservedcruise.com (accessed 10 March 2015).

⁶ As of 2016, night tours in Yokohama/Kawasaki and Yokkaichi are operated all year round. The tour schedules are available on the websites of the organizing entities.

tours cover industrial complexes (often called *kombinat*, a Russian loanword naturalized in Japanese) located in major urban bay areas that include Kawasaki/Yokohama, Chiba, Osaka, Yokkaichi, and Muroran (Hokkaidō) to name only a few. Organized tours usually charter a small-sized cruise ship, as it can approach factories from the sea for a view otherwise impossible to reach. In lieu of ships, some tours employ a large coach to transport participants to particularly impressive vantage points. Many of these tours last either 60 or 90 minutes, sold at a range of JPY 3,500 to 5,000, depending on itinerary, content, and duration. Some upscale tours offer cocktails and snacks, with an option to combine a full course dinner at extra costs.

Participants in these tours are not limited to avid factory or sci-fi fans but extend to a broad range of the general public. Whereas the activity of factory viewing in the 1980s was rather an introvert, private activity known and shared among limited sci-fi fans and likeminded people, today a broader range of audiences take part in this type of excursion.⁷ It seems that since around 2007 organized tours have become increasingly commercialized, being advertised in periodicals and in flyers available at train stations and on the Internet. Both men and women of various age groups are observed participating in organized tours, presumably those with some previous fascination for factories and cognizant of the term *kōjō moe* (Kim et al. 2010). As factory viewing has become a mass-appealing leisure-time activity, participants have shared their experiences online. For example, here is a participant's comment about a tour operated by Keihin Ferry Boat Co.:

As an enthusiastic factory fan, I joined the long-awaited “Night Factory View Cruise” together with my husband. [...] While listening to the captain's laid-back announcement, first we passed underneath Rainbow Bridge. The bridge I saw in front of me was spectacular. Later, we approached the swarm of cranes standing like giraffes along the coast. I was thrilled by the precious experience of seeing huge containers from a mammoth tanker. Then, finally, we entered the oil industrial zone, the main attraction. The burning flame and the beauty of lighted factories were so alluring that I felt like I could watch them forever.⁸

⁷ As of February 2016, it is possible to estimate that no less than 10,000 people have joined one or more organized tours per year, given that about 20 to 70 tours (depending on areas) with participants of approximately 20 to 30 people are operated each year in the bay areas of Yokohama/Kawasaki, Yokkaichi, Kitakyūshū, and Muroran. In the Hanshin bay area, tours are not regularly organized, but when the Takaishi Chamber of Commerce and Industry called for participants for a one-time event, more than 700 people applied for the limited number of 40 seats (*Sankei West* 2015).

⁸ <http://www.veltra.com/jp/japan/kanagawa/a/105322/reviews> (accessed 20 January 2016).

A majority of participants appear to savor not only the spectacle of factories but also the ambience of the night cruise itself, which offers them a dynamic perspective from sea and canals on coasts. As the above testimonial reveals, such objects as high-rise furnaces of oil refining facilities emit hot air perceptible even from a boat on the sea. These bodily experiences of industrial zones usually off-limits for the general public constitute the foremost privilege for tour participants. Individual factory viewers, instead, need to explore vantage points within the available space open to public.⁹

On the other hand, night tours provide participants with the best occasion for photo-shooting. A tour participant on a review site states that she decided to join the boat tour with family members because she was inspired by photographed factory views. Her expectation was thus already shaped by ready-made visual images. Nonetheless she emphasized that the view was “fairly magical,” and that it reminded her of “a sci-fi film or Ghibli anime.”¹⁰ These participants post photographed images of factories on the review site to share them with others. Personal blogs and other social networking sites have also become popular platforms where photographs and other tour details are introduced and shared.

The popularity of factory night tours owes much to the nationwide networking of industrial cities that possess scenic clusters of factories. For this movement, one of the most notable efforts is the establishment of the All-Japan Summit for Factory Night Scenery (*Zenkoku kōjō yakei samitto*), a conference that has been held annually since 2011. As of 2015, six major industrial cities, Muroran, Kawasaki, Yokkaichi, Amagasaki, Shūnan, and Kitakyūshū, represent the regions. The official goal of the conference is to contribute to the development of the tourist industry by publicizing the beauty of night factory views to all over Japan and beyond. Further, the summit focuses on the importance of economic development for tourist facilities by “promoting stay-type sightseeing” (*taizai-gata kankō*).¹¹ This initiative falls into the category of regional development especially compelling to areas faced with issues such as declining population and hollowed-out local industry. The systematic publicity is a driving force that has contributed to the increase of *kōjō moe* populations from the size of niche fan bases to a wider range of nationwide fans.

⁹ Ishii Tetsu and Ōyama Ken's *Kōjō moe* (2007) introduces a number of recommended spots such as parks, towers, bridges, and railway stations (as well as train rides) for major industrial zones throughout Japan. See the details in the chapter titled *Kōjō kanshō gaido* (“a guide to factory appreciation”) (Ishii and Ōyama 2007: 61–96).

¹⁰ <http://www.veltra.com/jp/japan/kanagawa/a/105322/reviews> (accessed 20 January 2016).

¹¹ <http://www.city.muroran.lg.jp/main/org6400/yakei.html> (accessed 20 April 2015).

6 Discovery of beauty: cultural politics of *kōjō moe*

The recent spread of the *kōjō moe* phenomenon holds multifarious layers of significance as a form of cultural industry. How and why, then, are industrial factories perceived “beautiful” by thousands of people today? It is beneficial to recall that *kōjō moe* is no longer an insular reaction of individuals but a social recognition of factories as an aesthetic object. Artificiality of industrial factories attracts the viewer; however, such artificial beauty generates “unfamiliarity, uneasiness, and unresolved questions,” and thereby also unravels “unbalance” embedded in our contemporary life (Matsutomo 2008: 79). The coexistence of these oxymoronic qualities in fact seems to be contributing to the popularity of industrial factories.

Promoted by local governments and private sectors, factory night tours have become an implicit political statement as well. With great emphasis on the beauty, they mask the dark side of industrialization that caused environmental pollution and jeopardized the public health in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, as documented in Masano Atsuko’s (2013) *Yondai kōgaibyō* (‘Four major pollution diseases’). Factory tours not only commemorate the high growth but, also conceal the past, transforming the public image of factories from a necessary evil to an aesthetic object. To revitalize the aging industry, developed countries like Japan have faced the necessity of massive renovation and reinvestment in existing facilities. On the other hand, Japan in the past few decades has gradually shifted its focus from exporting finished appliances to manufacturing devices and materials. The rise of this “material industry” (*sozai-gata sangyō*) has downsized the physical operation of factories, forcing the country to restructure its role in the global economy (Yamasaki 2007: 12). Even though many factories are no longer the lucrative economic capital they used to be, their aesthetic value can still boost local economy in the form of tourism and local cultural infrastructure.

Such attempts at shifting values are not unique to industrial factories in Japan. It is a historical phenomenon that has been prevalent also in other developed countries. One of the most well-known cases can be observed in the World Cultural Heritage Site at Völklinger Hütte (Völklingen Ironworks) and Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in Germany. These factories are no longer in operation and are now preserved as public parks (Ishii and Ōyama 2009: 86–88). They abandoned their primary role as steel mills in the late 1980s, and subsequently were made accessible to the public because of their aesthetic merit and historical significance. These cases in Germany also testify to the

mutative value of tangible objects, exemplifying a transient material condition that shifted to a durable value as cultural heritage. Similar to Japan's idea of cultural industry, the two German localities have played a conspicuous role through preservation, maintenance, and publicity.

However, the social implication of Völklinger Hütte and Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord seems to be slightly different from the Japanese *kōjō moe* phenomenon. The German cases appear to focus on the social value of those former steel mills not only by maintaining their good physical condition, but also by articulating their significance in industrial modernity. In this sense they echo what Grant McCracken calls "patina," a historic-cultural concept developed by Arjun Appadurai (1996). The value of aged objects is not innate to them: "property of goods by which their age becomes a key index of their high status [...] distinguishes a deeper dilemma, the dilemma of distinguishing wear from tear" by means of social implication (Appadurai 1996: 75). All tangible objects are bound to age; nonetheless, their value depends on extra-material factors beyond the properties innate to the objects themselves. Aged industrial factories continue to exist as valuable for the viewer's discovery of its beauty.¹²

7 From nostalgia to a sense of paramnesia

In the cases of Völklinger Hütte and Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, the local citizens have played a vital role in the process of preserving the factories, by virtue of their proactive engagement with the legacy of local industry. In contrast, contemporary Japan's factory night tours are a far more commercialized activity initiated mainly by local governments, travel agencies, and other private corporations. Their labor has been invested to produce a sort of psychological effect that might be called "imagined nostalgia," a consciously produced sense of yearning for the past without an actual memory of it.¹³ The

¹² Here, the notion of beauty belongs largely to subjective judgment in the popular cultural slogan of "discovery." Finding beauty in things hitherto considered insignificant or aesthetically unpleasant is not limited to factory booms but can be similarly observed in what has come to be known as *haikyo* (ruin, abandoned sites) boom or *haikyo* discovery. A salient example includes the extreme popularity of Gunkanjima (Battleship Island, alias of Hashima Island, Nagasaki), an abandoned site of colliery officially closed in 1974.

¹³ I borrow Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities within which individual constituents do not meet, know, or hear of the other fellow-members, and "yet in the mind of each lives the image of communion" (Anderson 1983: 49). The sense of belonging depends on individuals' choice, and their voluntary sentiments are oftentimes awakened by, for example, cultural monuments that commemorate historical events and thus provoke public reverence

characteristics of factory fans have also changed drastically, and though no precise data are available, the quickly sold out number of tour offers testifies to the fact that the *kōjō moe* population has been on the rise.¹⁴

In comparison with the German preservation of factories as social heritage, Japan's collective passion for factories that are still in use today, I argue, stems largely from the visual images circulated through both print media and the Internet. While sci-fi fans of the 1980s superimposed the image of futuristic technoscape on their local industrial sites, contemporary fans are well predisposed to visual images of factories that are already categorically packaged as cultural capital (oftentimes with an eponymous caption or headline). Further, as the research by Kim Miyoung and colleagues (2010) concludes, the emotive reaction to factories is strongly influenced by the photographic quality of images the viewer encounters. This may well suggest that fans and aficionados are not innately attracted by factories per se but by the images of them. In this regard, visual books as those aforementioned, as well as other media featuring high-resolution images, such as DVDs, social networking sites like Facebook and Mixi, and blogs are a notable driving force for the boom in interest for factories. These types of media support network communication among professional and amateur photographers or writers, with such topics as the use of SLR cameras, vantage points, angle, layout, and other technical aspects.¹⁵

How then does visual technology procure what we might call imagined nostalgia? Technological invention certainly extended the horizon of our visionary experience, thanks to its capability of realizing visual dimensions that are "unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens" (Benjamin 1969: 220). The process of attaining the unattainable entails a participation of ocular perception as specified by the Greek term "*aisthēsis*," which includes pre-intellectualized senses (Jōmaru 2009: 12). It veers away from the traditional categories of art, and instead brings the viewer back to the primordial realm of vision as part of bodily perception. If we expand this observation, such primordial experience through vision without intellectual mediation can lead to the sense of paramnesia or confabulation that is exclusively provoked by visual images, with no intervention of historically contextualized knowledge. This is another outcome effectuated by factories either through visionary experience on site or

(Anderson 1983: 50). I propose to consider that factory night tours and photographed images function as reified monuments through which imagined nostalgia can be publicly shared.

¹⁴ Many tours accept online registrations. Some sites such as the one operated by Tour Plus One for Kawasaki and Daiichi Kankō for Yokkaichi (<http://www.daiichi-kanko.co.jp/cruise>) update availabilities of each tour.

¹⁵ See, e.g., <http://yokkaichi.higoyomi.com/index.html> (accessed 20 January 2016).



Figure 1: Night view of the Yokkaichi Industrial Area (Saizou, <http://logcamera.com/yokkaiti-kojo/>).

through photographed images. Digital images condition the viewer's experience of objects (factories) as second-hand and influence his or her epistemic grasp of given visuals, at times provoking a sense of *déjà vu*.

The sense of *paramnesia* is similar to the feeling of nostalgia, but in the case of *kōjō moe*, it could be a longing for a world that neither exists nor can be reached in reality. The sense is not a cognitive construct but rather a psychological effect that can be awakened by images. Such pseudo-nostalgic sentiments, not being grounded in actual memory, are the byproduct of sensational images that entail the photographer's patient labor. In his blog, a factory fan mentions that he often stays at industrial sites overnight to shoot the best images to this extent (see Figure 1). His artistic drive has nothing to do with the nostalgia for the age of high economic growth, but solely with passion for imagination-provoking images. To explore the sense of wonder embedded in images, some photographers technologically modify them. One of many popular methods is HDRI (high dynamic range imaging), a technique that minimizes a contrast between darkness and brightness by synthesizing multiple image shots with different levels of exposure to light. The result gained by this method is sensational, somewhat out-of-this-worldly and yet oddly provokes pseudo-



Figure 2: Factory view of the Keihin Industrial Area (Kawasaki City) captured by HDRI technique (Ōkura Hiroshi, <http://hdrtechnoscape.jp/?cat=3>).

nostalgic feelings, as the neutralized tone reveals details that are not perceivable either by human eyes or ordinary shooting techniques (see Figure 2).

As exemplified by HDRI, visual technology and multimedia have drastically altered the viewer's perception of objects and the physical world at large. *Kōjō moe* lends itself to this material condition that has fueled mass desire of visualizing their artistic imagination. Digital techniques have radically expanded the limits of the human eye, and to a large extent these artificial outcomes constitute the essence of what *kōjō moe* sensibilities perceive as *the beautiful*. Furthermore, artificially modified images have cultivated a new terrain hitherto unknown to our habitual perception of objects at the vision's limit. Realizing a de-familiarized image of factories, as the picture in Figure 2, such technologies as HDRI have succeeded in delving into an unfathomable realm of our consciousness. With the minimal contrast between darkness and light, HDRI displays a world far more flat than the in-depth dimension perceived by human eye. Setting aside the limitation of our ocular faculty, the visual manipulation achieves an ineffable harmony between nature and artificiality. Visual as well as optical technology has come to the point at which it creates an aura that does not exist in reality. The situation parallels the significance of cameras in the 1920s, as monumentally portrayed in Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Cam-*

era (1929).¹⁶ There, the artificial vision of the movie camera is not a simple device for recording motions of objects; far more than that, the device actualized “the sense and subjectivity” that are more acute than the mechanical functions of the human eye (Itagaki 2011: 39). Likewise, digital technology has not only set the horizon of our ocular experience but also controlled the viewer’s sensation and even emotive responses.

To understand the contemporary implication of *kōjō moe*, it is impossible to bypass these impacts of visual technology and media on the viewer’s experience. Precisely for their enticing power, viewers are first allured to virtual images and then drawn to actual factory tours. This twofold process also constitutes the essence of *kōjō moe* as leisure, and it has not drastically changed since the 1980s when *Blade Runner* first stirred sci-fi fans’ imagination. On the other hand, it is also undeniable that, for the postwar generation of baby boomers, paying homage to the sites of industrial factories is, in the form of volitional activity, a self-conscious gesture to express a sense of awe or reverence for the country’s epochal legacy. Therefore, for some people the visual splendor of factories remains less important than physically visiting actual sites (Matsutomo 2008: 77). All in all, as contemporary sociocultural phenomenon, *kōjō moe* cannot be attributed to a single factor but has to be viewed as an aggregate of the physical presence of factories, the historical implication of them, and the sensibilities of the viewer.

8 Conclusion

This study has focused on multiple roles of the viewer in the contemporary phenomenon of *kōjō moe*. The analysis on aspects such as socioeconomic history, factory night tours as a form of cultural industry, and technological intervention has shown the milieus which the viewers collectively inhabit. As an experimental case study inspired by the factory tourism boom, the analysis has largely relied on limited qualitative data as well as on sources available in mass media. Yet the study readily affirms that contemporary Japanese society has been driven by fascinations with visual pleasure. Branched out of popular *moe* sensibility, *kōjō moe* is nothing but an implicit craving for visual excitement with a hope to energize a society which is laden with social and economic

¹⁶ Retrieved from
<https://archive.org/details/ChelovekskinoapparatomManWithAMovieCamera>
 (accessed 30 May 2016).

issues. While being set aside in this study, a further investigation can elucidate how abolished and abandoned factories, or *haikyo*, which are “the real rubbish,” have been perceived, imagined, and circulated in today’s multimedia platforms. This possible study would further articulate the correlation between material condition and its social and cultural value embedded in industrial factories and *haikyo* sites.

Kōjō moe is an ongoing trend in motion. Even so, we can provisionally situate the widespread phenomena at an intersection of multiple factors: (re)discovery of aesthetic value in factories; invention of cultural industry by commodification (night tours, photography books, etc.), and circulation of digitalized visual images. The physical presence of iron edifices, then, commemorates the legacy of industrial high growth while transmuting the material end into the renewed aesthetic value. These contemporary workings of industrial factories are mediated, and transmitted by visual technology. The cultural industry of *kōjō moe* constitutes these multifarious layers of value-making labor. Thanks to that intervention, in the viewer’s eyes the dazzling lights of urban landscape take a concrete form of beauty. This well compensates for the irreversibility of history, and discovering this renewed value suggests not self-pity but conscious self-fashioning of a civilized society that cannot disavow its collective sense of urgency toward the impending age of postindustrial society.

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